

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2471

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1806

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR KS KN

SUBJ: INFORMAL CONTACTS BETWEEN ROK RED CROSS AND NORTH KOREANS

REF: SEOUL 1228

SUMMARY: U.S. MILITARY OFFICERS IN PANMUNJOM HAVE NOTICED
SOMEWHAT UNUSUAL PATTERN OF INFORMAL CONTACTS BETWEEN ROK
RED CROSS AND NORTH KOREAN RED CROSS AND MILITARY OFFICERS,
IN JOINT SECURITY AREA. RED CROSS VICE PRESIDENT INFORMED
EMBASSY ONE CONTACT WAS NON-PRODUCTIVE EFFORT AT NORMALIZING
RED CROSS MEETING AND ONE OTHER WAS ARRANGED TO RESPOND TO
PERSONAL REQUESTS FROM NORTH KOREANS FOR MEDICINE AND
REFERENCE MATERIALS. EMBASSY CONTINUES TO MONITOR.
END SUMMARY.

1. U.N. COMMAND OFFICERS AT PANMUNJOM HAVE NOTICED
SOMEWHAT UNUSUAL PATTERN OF INFORMAL CONTACTS DURING
PAST MONTH BETWEEN ROK RED CROSS OFFICIALS AND NORTH
KOREANS. ON FEBRUARY 11, FOLLOWING REGULAR
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NON-PRODUCTIVE RED CROSS WORKING LEVEL MEETING (REFTEL)
THREE NORTH KOREAN AND THREE ROK RED CROSS REPRESENTATIVES
ENTERED CONFERENCE ROOM FOR ADDITIONAL 30 MINUTE
DISCUSSION CONCERNING WHICH EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED NO
RECORD. WHEN QUERIED BY US MILITARY OFFICER ABOUT
PURPOSE OF SECOND MEETING, ROK RED CROSS OFFICER
RESPONDED DISCUSSION WAS ABOUT TRYING TO NORMALIZE

PRESENT NON-PRODUCTIVE RED CROSS MEETINGS. HE SAID CONVERSATION HAD NOT PRODUCED RESULTS.

2. ON FEBRUARY 23 ROK RED CROSS DUTY OFFICER AND ONE OTHER ROK RED CROSS OFFICER, MET BRIEFLY WITH NROTH KOREAN MILITARY OFFICER ON BENCH OUTSIDE ONE OF BUILDINGS IN JOINT SECURITY AREA (JSA) ON NORTH SIDE OF DIVIDING LINE (MDL). ON MARCH 2, ROK RED CROSS DUTY OFFICER AND ONE OTHER ROK RED CROSS OFFICER MET WITH SAME NORTH KOREAN MILITARY OFFICER ON BENCH OUTSIDE BUILDING IN JSA NORTH OF MDL. NORTHKOREAN WAS LT. COLONEL WHO CUSTOMARILY ATTENDS WEDNESDAY MAC LANGUAGE MEETING. CONVERSATION LASTED FOR 10-15 MINUTES.

3. EMBOFF ASKED ROK RED CROSS SPOKESMAN CHUNG CHU-NYON DURING CONVERSATION MARCH 2, WHETHER THERE HAD BEEN ANY PROGRESS IN CONVERTING RED CROSS CONTACTS INTO MORE MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE. CHUNG RESPONDED IN CIRCUITOUS, CONSPIRATORIAL FASHING, DELIVERING LENGTHY EXPOSITION ABOUT TIGHT CONGROL OVER RED CROSS CONTACTS EXERCISED BY KCIA AND CONSTRAINTS IMPOSED BY KCIA DIRECTOR ON RED CROSS OFFICIALS CONTACTS WITH AMERICANS. FOLLOWING THIS LENGTHY ASIDE CHUNG SAID IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT INFORMAL CONTACTS WERE TAKING PLACE. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT RED CROSS DUTY OFFICER, A MR. PAK, WHOULD NOT BE THE CHANNEL THAT WOULD BE USED FOR SUCH CONTACTS BECAUSE HE WAS NOT IN THE DIRECT KCIA CHAIN. CUNG ALS SAID THAT RED CROSS PRESIDENT YI HO WOULD NOT BE INFORMED ON THIS SUBJECT AND IT WAS QUITE LIKELY THAT RED CROSS AMBASSADOR

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(AND VICE PRESIDENT) CHI YONG-T'AE MIGHT NOT BE INFORMED AS WELL.

4. POL CONSELLOR AND EMBOFF SUBSEQUENTLY MET WITH RED CROSS AMBASSADOR CHI YONG T'AE MARCH 4, RECOUNTED THE SERIES OF MEETINGS WE HAD NOTICED AT JSA (PARAS 1 AND 2 ABOVE) AND ASKED IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY PROGRESS IN INFORMAL CONTACTS. CHI, WHO APPEARED NERVOUS THROUGHT CONVERSATION, SAID FEBRUARY 11 MEETING HAD BEEN EFFORT TO NORMALIZE RED CROSS CONTACTS BUT IT HAD BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL. HE WAS NON-COMMITTAL IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT WHO HAD INITIATED CONTACT, AND DID NOT RESPOND WHEN ASKED ABOUT SUBSTANCE OF PROPOSALS. HE SAID HE WAS AWARE OF ONLY ONE OTHER INFORMAL CONTACT BETWEEN RED CROSS OFFICIAL AND NORTH KOREAN ARMY OFFICER WHICH, HE SAID, WAS FOR PURPOSE OF PROVIDING NORTH KOREAN OINTMENT FOR FROST BITE. HE SAID THAT NORTH KOREANS HAD ALSO ASKED FOR COPY OF MOST RECENT EDITION OF SOUTH KOREAN ANNUAL AND THAT RED CROSS OFFICER HAD RESPONDED THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO TRADE COPY OF SOUTH KOREAN ANNUAL FOR COPY OF NORTH KOREAN EQUIVALENT PUBLICATON. CHI SAID NO OTHER CONTACTS HAD TAKEN PLACE

TO HIS KNOWLEDGE AND IF THERE WERE ANY MEANINGFUL CONTACTS
OF ANY PROGRESS IN NORMALIZING RED CROSS TALKS AMERICANS
WOULD BE THE FIRST TO BE INFORMED.

5. APART FROM ABOVE ACTING FONMIN YUN TOLD CHARGE
THAT HE HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF ANY UNUSUAL NORTH-SOUTH CONTACTS.

6. COMMENT: WHILE WE DO NOT WISH TO EXAGGERATE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT
MAY BE COMPLETELY MEANINGLESS SERIES OF ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN ROK
RED CROSS AND NORTHKOREAN OFFICIALS, CHI SEEMED SOMEWHAT EVASIVE
IN HIS RESPONSES AND WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO COMPLETELY DISCOUNT
AT THIS POINT POSSIBILITY THAT ROK RED CROSS AND NORTH
KOREANS ARE TAKING ABOUT SOMETHING MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN
FROST BITE CURES. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THIS SUBJECT
CLOSELY. END COMMENT.
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